



S U M M E R 2 0 0 5

# Veterans' Health

VA Capitol  
Health Care  
Network  
VISN 5  
FIVE STAR SERVICE FOR THOSE WHO SERVED

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continuous care** *page 2*

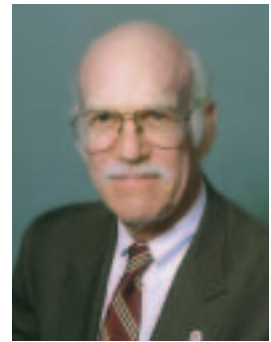
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# Planning for continuous care



James J. Nocks,  
M.D., M.S.H.A.

**T**o provide “five-star service to those who served,” we must have highly qualified staff members in VA Medical Centers, the Network and VA Central Office. VA must be prepared to provide uninterrupted service even when employees retire or move on to other positions. Succession Planning helps us handle such changes, especially when it comes to replacing physicians, nurses, pharmacists and various specialty technologists who require high degrees of training and experience.

Succession Planning involves a comprehensive review of staffing levels and historical workforce trends. First, we analyze staff members by occupations and turnover levels. We then compare the list by age group, emphasizing the number of people by occupation who are eligible for retirement, as well as the historical retirement and turnover levels (not everyone retires when they reach the eligible age). Next, we identify the top critical occupations across the Network. Often, these positions are hard to fill, requiring more intensive recruiting efforts. We consider all this information, along with current workforce and economic issues within the community, plus future goals and special needs established by VA Central Office and the Network.

At VISN 5, we prepare and update a five-year Succession Workforce Strategic Plan each year, using it as a guideline to help the Network Director and Medical Center Directors determine future needs and decisions. We enlist the help of many groups, such as the Succession and Workforce Planning Committee, Employee Satisfaction Sub-Committee, Diversity Advisory Committee, Human Resource Managers Workgroup and RN Recruiters Workgroup. These groups support a range of programs and activities, including:

- professional recruitment through trade-journal advertising
- college-campus recruitment
- supervisory and leadership training
- educational programs to help staff prepare for advancement
- recruitment and retention activities
- employee-survey-response action plans
- entrance- and exit-survey findings
- patient-satisfaction surveys
- other issues that help make VA the employer of choice

We also encourage and support other Network and national training programs, such as the Network HPDM Programs, Network Leadership Development Institute, Technical Career Fields Program and Executive Career Field Program.

Through efforts like these, we will continue to meet our VA mission—“to honor America’s veterans by providing exceptional health care that improves their health and well-being.”

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "James J. Nocks, M.D." with a stylized flourish at the end.

James J. Nocks, M.D., M.S.H.A., Network Director  
VA Capitol Health Care Network, VISN 5



The 3 Tesla MRI lets doctors view high-resolution, detailed images of the body, leading to better diagnosis and treatment.

## The best in diagnostic imaging

### A new MRI at the DCVAMC offers faster, more accurate results

**T**he Washington DC VA Medical Center opened its new 3 Tesla Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) Suite on April 7 in the presence of the DCVAMC leadership and Radiology Service staff. Klemens Barth, M.D., Radiology Service Chief, pointed out the acquisition's significance for bringing more advanced diagnostic imaging services to veterans in the Washington metropolitan area.

The new MRI has significantly improved the ability to diagnose acute brain, vascular and cardiac diseases—when tissue-saving treatment is most effective—and is expected to better spot a wide range of conditions, from Alzheimer's disease and chronic ischemic heart disease to early-stage cancer.

#### A closer look

The 3 Tesla MRI is safe and allows faster and more accurate

imaging, especially important when studying the heart and lungs. It's less affected by breathing motion during abdominal studies than older MRI units. It also allows fast-flowing blood in the arteries to be imaged without interference from overlapping veins.

In addition, the 3 Tesla MRI is shorter and more open than older models, helping patients feel more comfortable and relaxed during imaging. Because of the technology's strong magnetic field, patients who have ferromagnetic implants and pacemakers need to take special precaution.

The DCVAMC is one of the first three VA Medical Centers nationwide to acquire the 3 Tesla MRI, which will become more widely available over the next few years, and is proud to offer this advanced technology early to patients. ★

### What is MRI?

**M**agnetic resonance imaging, or MRI, is a painless test that produces clear images of the body without the help of X-rays. The test uses a powerful magnetic field, radio waves and a computer to produce these images and pinpoint disease.

During the procedure, the patient is placed in the MRI scanner—typically a large, doughnut-shaped magnet open at both ends. The magnetic field aligns atomic particles called protons, found in most of the body's tissues. Radio waves cause these particles to produce signals, which a receiver picks up within the scanner. The computer processes these signals and creates sharp images of the tissues as “slices,” which doctors can view from any angle.





The DCVAMC Design and Construction team members (from left) David May, Project Superintendent; Greg Seekins, Project Manager; Santiago Montalvo, Chief, Projects Section; and Brian Weinmeister, Contracting Officer Technical Representative, make extraordinary efforts to improve patient-care services.

**M**ost patients visiting The Washington DC VA Medical Center never know all that our Facilities Management Service employees do to make their stays as comfortable as possible. But staff members oversee everything—from plumbing, heating and air conditioning to major renovations and expansions. Their challenging, often time-consuming work involves much research, coordination, planning, adjustment, detail and attention.

### All for the patients

Our Facilities Management Service employees have been working hard to complete various projects aimed at bringing better care to patients. Some current efforts include:

- renovating the front section of 4B West to relocate the Respiratory Care Department and improve access to patient services.
- continuing to develop the new Outpatient Surgery Center on the DCVAMC's second floor. This center will include a suite for same-day procedures and new urology clinic suites. Patients soon will have access to a new genital-urinary operating suite, too.
- working to replace the generator in the Comprehensive Nursing and Rehabilitation Center, which will improve emergency-power capacity for that wing of the DCVAMC.



## Behind the scenes

### Recognizing the outstanding work of our Facilities Management Service

- getting space ready to install a new linear accelerator, recently acquired by the DCVAMC. Doctors will use this cutting-edge technology to treat oncology patients.
- installing a new pneumatic tube system to reduce wait times in the Lab and Pharmacy. The DCVAMC has 14 points of delivery, including the Emergency Room, Surgical Suite, Inpatient Units and Nursing Home Units.

### But wait, there's more

The DCVAMC is particularly proud of the Design and Construction crew in Facilities Management Service. These talented engineers recently completed two important projects—the new

Preventive Medicine and Rehabilitation Suite and the Clinic Registration Office. Both areas offer patients innovative, friendly environments. Next time you enter the DCVAMC, you'll see the results of these creative thinkers.

The DCVAMC wants you to remember those “behind-the-scenes” people who work for you in Facilities Management Service. Most of them will never have direct contact with veteran patients and will never be thanked for their outstanding services except by their fellow employees. And did we mention, they keep the facility sparkling clean, the automatic doors opening and closing properly and the utilities in working order? We thought you ought to know. ★

## Where there's smoke, there's DCVAMC employees to the rescue

**A** fun-filled trip to Atlantic City for patients of The Washington DC VA Medical Center's Comprehensive Nursing and Rehabilitation Center (CNRC) ended with a roadside rescue when one of the buses transporting patients caught fire.

### Without warning

On April 7, DCVAMC Voluntary Service, Recreation Therapy and CNRC staff members escorted a group of nine seniors—many in wheelchairs—to the Trump Plaza Casino in Atlantic City, N.J. Patients received a warm welcome and enjoyed a day of camaraderie, complete with gambling, board-walk browsing and fine dining.

But during the trip home, at about 8 p.m., VA driver Jake Rumph noticed the windshield wiper on the driver's side wasn't working. He soon detected a strange smell. Rumph quickly pulled the bus to the side of the road, just as smoke began billowing into the vehicle on the driver's side. Within 30 seconds, the bus filled with fumes. The bus was on fire!

### Staff heroes

Rumph, second VA driver Troy Campbell and volunteer Mark King acted quickly. They located the fire's source and, using the vehicle's fire extinguisher, put out the flames.



Residents of the DCVAMC Comprehensive Nursing and Rehabilitation Center, along with staff and volunteers, made the most of their trip to Atlantic City despite braving a bus fire.

During this time, Voluntary Service and Recreation Therapy staff members Subrena Utley, Karen Butler, Donald McNair, Stephanie Burns and Lucille Lisle began moving the patients from the bus into the second vehicle, carrying at least three patients because the wheelchair lift wasn't operable.

Once patients were safely inside the second bus, CNRC nurses Ego Ndubizu and Robin Bennett, along with volunteer Rusty Bee, began checking patients to make sure they weren't suffering respiratory problems or other health issues related to inhaling smoke.

The fire department, police

and paramedics arrived on-site within minutes. All patients, staff and volunteers returned to the DCVAMC in the second vehicle except Campbell and King, who stayed with the first bus to await the tow. They didn't leave the roadside until 6 a.m. the next morning.

The DCVAMC staff and volunteers worked together thoughtfully and effectively, making patient safety their first priority. While the trip proved more exciting than expected, the patients enjoyed it. They were extremely grateful for the care and attention they received from the DCVAMC employees and volunteers. ★

# A shot at a flu-free season



## Get your free flu shot!

**T**o protect your health, all VISN 5 Medical Centers will be offering free walk-in flu shots this fall. For dates and more information, call your nearest facility beginning September 2005.

### The Martinsburg VA Medical Center



**1-800-817-3807**

You can also call the Cumberland, Hagerstown, Harrisonburg, Stephens City, Franklin or Petersburg Out-patient Clinics. (See page 8 for a listing of facilities.)

### The VA Maryland Health Care System

**(410) 605-7307**

### The Washington DC VA Medical Center

**(202) 745-8247 or (202) 745-8577**

Influenza, known as the flu, is a respiratory infection caused by a virus. The infection can be mild, but it can also cause severe illness and even death. Yet you can prevent the flu or at least lessen its severity by getting a flu vaccine (shot) every year. The best time to get a flu shot is in October or November. However, getting it in December or later will still protect you against the flu.

As part of the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) prevention program, all VISN 5 VA Medical Centers will be offering **free** flu shots to enrolled veterans this fall. VISN 5 is taking steps to guarantee an adequate flu vaccine

supply so no enrolled veteran will be turned away. The VHA, along with the U.S. Surgeon General and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, strongly recommends you get this vaccine.

### Flu facts

The flu spreads easily from person to person. About one-fifth of people living in the United States get the flu each year. Of those, about 130,000 are sick enough to need hospital care, and about 36,000 die.

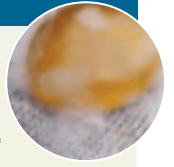
The flu usually makes you sick for a week or more. Symptoms include fever, headache, extreme tiredness, dry cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose and muscle aches. Many people also suffer nausea, vomiting and diarrhea.





## Hand washing 101

**W**et your hands with warm running water and apply liquid or clean bar soap. Lather well and rub your hands together vigorously for at least 10 to 15 seconds. Scrub your wrists, the backs of your hands, between your fingers and under your fingernails. Rinse well and dry with a clean or disposable towel. When you're in a public washroom, use a paper towel if available to turn off the faucet.



## When to wash your hands

**W**ash up anytime your hands are visibly dirty as well as:

- before, during and after preparing or eating food
- after using the bathroom
- after handling animals or their waste
- after coughing, sneezing or blowing your nose
- after changing a diaper (wash baby's hands, too)
- before and after treating wounds or attending to an ill person
- after handling garbage
- before inserting or removing contact lenses

Not getting the flu shot increases the chance you'll get pneumonia, an infection and inflammation of the lungs that often stems from a cold or the flu. Symptoms of pneumonia vary and include chills, fever, sweating, chest pain, cough, headache and muscle pain. This year, most people admitted to VISN 5 medical centers for pneumonia failed to get the flu shot.

If you're allergic to the flu vaccine or eggs, or if you're pregnant, the flu shot may not be right for you. Your health care provider can advise you. But you should get the flu shot if you're at higher risk of getting the flu and its complications. You fall into this category if you:

- are 50 or older
- live in a long-term care facility
- are a health care worker
- have a long-term health problem, such as emphysema, asthma, diabetes, cancer, anemia, HIV/AIDS, spinal cord injury, heart failure, kidney failure or liver disease

The flu shot is safe, and it works. While it's not always 100 percent effective in fighting the flu, it can make the illness' symptoms milder. The flu shot is not just for elderly or sick people; it's also for young and healthy people who want to decrease their flu risk and protect others around them. While the flu shot may cause side effects such as a sore arm, aching or a slight fever, it does not cause the flu.

## Flu-free tips

Besides having a flu shot every year, you can take steps to avoid getting or spreading the flu. Follow these guidelines:

- Wash your hands frequently.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Stay home when you're sick if possible.
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing.
- Keep your immune system strong by eating a variety of nutritious foods and exercising regularly.
- Quit smoking.

If you think you may have the flu, contact your Medical Advice Line or health care provider within two days your symptoms begin. Medications may help if you take them at this early stage. For more health information, visit VISN 5's Web site at [www.va.gov/visn5](http://www.va.gov/visn5). ★





## New, improved labs open

**More endoscopic and cardiac cath services mean better patient care**



**T**he Baltimore VA Medical Center recently celebrated the opening of its new Gastroenterology (GI) and Pulmonary Endoscopy Center as well as its recently upgraded Cardiac Catheterization Laboratory. Both facilities are designed to improve the quality of care for patients who receive endoscopic and cardiac cath services.

The \$1.1 million GI and Pulmonary Endoscopy Center offers colonoscopy, upper endoscopy, sigmoidoscopy and several other specialized procedures, plus various pulmonary services ranging from simple spirometry to sophisticated physiologic testing.

The expanded 5,800-square-foot center is more than double its former size. Along with a centralized waiting area, the center has five large procedure rooms, two pulmonary function labs, an

expanded recovery area with eight beds, a nurses' station, a conference room and office space.

"This state-of-the-art center was developed to better serve the needs of the veteran population, in which there is a growing and prevalent need for endoscopic services," said Keith Wilson, M.D., Chief of Gastroenterology at the Baltimore VAMC. Dr. Wilson estimates the center will perform close to 3,000 endoscopic procedures this year.

The new center provides upgraded computer equipment, a new endoscope and a separate room dedicated for advanced procedures such as endoscopic retrograde cholangiopancreatography (ERCP)—used to diagnose and treat bile duct, pancreas and gallbladder disorders. Patients enjoy less wait time and faster treatment, recovery and discharge

in a centralized area. The center conducts about five procedures a day.

"With regard to capability, technology and quality of care, the new GI and Pulmonary Endoscopy Center is one of the best of its kind in the country," said Dr. Wilson.

Over the past 30 years, the number of cardiac cath procedures has increased 315 percent, according to a recent issue of *Cath Lab Digest*. To meet this expanding need, the Baltimore VAMC's upgraded Cardiac Cath Laboratory offers all new state-of-the-art equipment and technology. One level up from the GI and Pulmonary Endoscopy Center, the lab provides superior diagnostic, imaging and intervention services, placing the Baltimore VAMC on the cutting edge of interventional cardiology. ★



From left: Robert Peters, M.D., Chief, Cardiology Section; Keith Wilson, M.D., Chief of Gastroenterology; Dennis H. Smith, Director, VA Maryland Health Care System; Philip Mackowiak, M.D., Director, Medical Care Clinical Center; Nevins Todd, M.D., Chief, Pulmonary Section; and Barry Reicher, M.D., Chief, Cardiac Catheterization Lab, get ready to celebrate the opening of the new Gastroenterology and Pulmonary Endoscopy Center and upgraded Cardiac Cath Lab at the Baltimore VAMC.



# HIGHLIGHTS



Coming soon

## A new community for retired vets

**P**lans to develop a veteran-focused retirement community on the former Fort Howard VA Medical Center campus are underway.

VA signed a memorandum of understanding about **Bayside at Ft. Howard**—the name selected for the proposed retirement community—on January 20 with Fort Howard Senior Housing Associates, LLC, of Washington, D.C.

Since then, the two parties have prepared environmental impact studies, reviewed construction plans for a new VA outpatient clinic at Fort Howard, held meetings with

State Historical Preservation Office and Baltimore County representatives and finalized a development plan and pricing structure for the community. VA and Fort Howard Senior Housing Associates are also negotiating a long-term, enhanced-use property lease.

VA and Fort Howard Senior Housing Associates will hold town hall meetings after the lease signing to provide local community members and veterans service organization representatives with the final plans and timelines for the new community. They'll also invite these members and representatives to

Learn more!

**F**ort Howard Senior Housing Associates has set up a toll-free information line and an e-mail address for veterans and local community members interested in receiving updates about **Bayside at Ft. Howard**. Many local residents have already registered. To find out the latest news, call **1-866-698-9731** or e-mail **info@baysidefthoward.com**.

participate in a formal groundbreaking ceremony before construction begins. ★



## Palliative care you can trust

**Lending loving hands to patients  
at the end stage of life**



**T**he Palliative Care Unit at The Martinsburg VA Medical Center has grown in size and commitment over the last 15 years. The unit—attached to The Martinsburg VAMC—provides care to many patients coping with end-stage cancer, heart failure, kidney failure, emphysema and diabetes.

### **A personal touch**

The Martinsburg VAMC's palliative care model focuses on individualized treatment planning and follows a holistically oriented, interdisciplinary approach. Staff

### **Our staff at a glance**

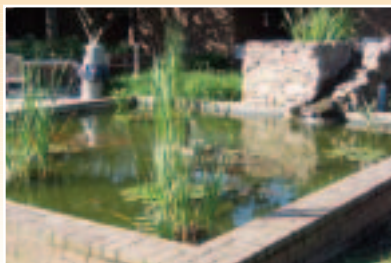
**T**hese core Martinsburg VAMC Palliative Care Unit team members provide superior care to patients:

- **Jianming Xie, M.D., Medical Director, Palliative Care Unit, board certified in hospice and palliative care**
- **Ricky White, P.A.-C., Medical Coordinator, Palliative Care Unit**
- **Jack Tennant, R.N., B.S.N., Nurse Manager, Palliative Care Unit**
- **Wendy Pacek, R.N., Certified Palliative Care/Hospice Nurse**
- **Robert Smith, S.W., Grief/Loss Consultant**
- **Bruce Corsino, Ph.D., Psychology and Ethics**
- **Elisabeth Sethi, M.D., Facility Service Line Manager, Geriatrics/LTC, board certified in hospice and palliative care**

# H I G H L I G H T S



An attractive courtyard and soothing fishpond help palliative patients and their families feel at home.



members work together to provide continual, personal care to patients and support loved ones and caregivers. Experienced nurses cater to families' special needs.

Through the Martinsburg VAMC, the Palliative Care Unit offers integrated services, such as medical providers 24 hours a day as well as recreational, spiritual and emotional support.

Special accommodations help patients and their loved ones feel at home, including:

- a separate entrance to a courtyard and fishpond
- six private and 10 semiprivate rooms
- 24-hour visitation for loved ones, including overnight stays
- a comfortable family lounge with a kitchenette, microwave, refrigerator and television

## Hospice partnerships

To continue to provide the best palliative care to patients and their families, Martinsburg VAMC staff members participate in various hospice programs and events. The Geriatrics/Long-Term Care staff enthusiastically embraced the new Hospice Veterans Partnership (HVP) initiative, hosting the first State of West Virginia HVP Program. The Palliative Care Program has affiliations with Hospice

of the Panhandle in West Virginia, Blue Ridge Hospice in Virginia and Hospice of Washington County in Maryland. Palliative Care Unit staff members regularly attend End-of-Life Coalition meetings at the Hospice of the Panhandle in Martinsburg.

In addition, two Palliative Care Unit staff members—Jack Tennant, R.N., B.S.N., Nurse Manager, and Ricky White, P.A.-C., Medical Coordinator—presented at the October 2004 Hospice Network of Maryland's Annual Conference in Ocean City, Md.

For more information about the Palliative Care Unit at The Martinsburg VAMC, call (304) 263-0811, ext. 4769. ★



Our dedicated staff members at the Palliative Care Unit work together to meet the special needs of patients and their loved ones.

Sitting in the front row, from left, are Anna Elwood, R.N., Home Health & Hospice Referral Coordinator; Wendy Pacek, R.N., Certified Palliative Care/Hospice Nurse; and Roxanne Barlow, Geriatric Clinical Nutrition Specialist. Standing in the back row, from left, are Robert Smith, S.W., Grief/Loss Consultant; Elisabeth Sethi, M.D., Facility Service Line Manager, Geriatrics/LTC, board certified in hospice and palliative care; Jianming Xie, M.D., Medical Director, Palliative Care Unit, board certified in hospice and palliative care; Jack Tennant, R.N., B.S.N., Nurse Manager, Palliative Care Unit; and Ricky White, P.A.-C., Medical Coordinator, Palliative Care Unit.

## Growing to better serve you

**H**ere's a look at how the Palliative Care Unit at The Martinsburg VA Medical Center has developed since its opening in 1990:

- In 1990, The Martinsburg VAMC established a 10-bed Hospice/Palliative Care Unit. In 2003, it increased the number of beds to 16.

- From 1997 through 2000, about 72 patients a year received end-of-life care. This number rose to 98 in 2003 and 105 in 2004.

- Referrals to home hospice in the community rose from less than 10 a year before 2003 to 17 in 2003 and to 62 in 2004.







# VA Capitol Health Care Network

## Veterans Integrated Service Network 5 (VISN 5)

### Important Telephone Numbers

#### VA Maryland Health Care System

**Baltimore VAMC**

1-800-463-6295

**VAMHCS Medical Advice Line**

1-800-865-2441

**Perry Point VAMC**

1-800-949-1003

**Automated Prescription Refill and  
Clinic Appointment System**

1-800-463-6295, ext. 7395

**Baltimore VA Rehabilitation  
& Extended Care Center**

1-800-463-6295

#### Martinsburg VA Medical Center

**Martinsburg VAMC**

(304) 263-0811

**Medical Advice Line**

1-800-817-3807 or (304) 262-4855

**Patient Eligibility**

(304) 263-0811, ext. 3758/3757  
Monday–Friday, 8 a.m.–4:30 p.m.  
or ext. 3050 after 4:30 p.m.

**Automated Prescription Refill System**

(304) 263-0811, ext. 4870 (all hours)

**Outreach Coordinator**

(304) 263-0811, ext. 4031

#### Washington DC VA Medical Center

**General Information**

(202) 745-8000

**Medical Advice Line**

(202) 745-8247

**VETS Information**

(202) 745-4046

**PTSD Clinic Number**

(202) 745-8591

#### Outpatient Clinics

**Cambridge, MD**

(410) 228-6243

**Charlotte Hall, MD**

(301) 884-7102

**Cumberland, MD**

(301) 724-0061

**Fort Howard, MD**

(410) 477-1800

**Glen Burnie, MD**

(410) 590-4140

**Greenbelt, MD**

(301) 345-2463

**Hagerstown, MD**

(301) 665-1462

**Loch Raven, MD**

(410) 605-7650

**Pocomoke City, MD**

(410) 957-6718

**Alexandria, VA**

(703) 719-6797

**Harrisonburg, VA**

(540) 442-1773

**Stephens City, VA**

(540) 869-0600

**Franklin, WV**

(304) 358-2355

**Petersburg, WV**

(304) 257-5817

**Washington, DC**

(202) 745-8685

#### Vet Centers

**Baltimore, MD**

(410) 764-9400

**Cambridge, MD**

(410) 228-6305, ext. 4123

**Elkton, MD**

(410) 392-4485

**Silver Spring, MD**

(301) 589-1073

**Washington, DC**

(202) 543-8821

**Martinsburg, WV**

(304) 263-6776

**Alexandria, VA**

(703) 360-8633

#### Veterans Benefit Administration

**1-800-827-1000**

#### Education Information Hotline

**1-800-442-4551**

**Visit us on our website at [www.va.gov/visn5](http://www.va.gov/visn5)**

#### Veterans' Health

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